

## The ultimate foodie guide to Andalusia

by Great British Chefs

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*Spain's southernmost region of Andalusia is known for its stunning landscapes, busy cities and vibrant flamenco. But, from olive oil to seafood, it is also rich with world-class produce. We explore a region with an exceptional natural larder.*

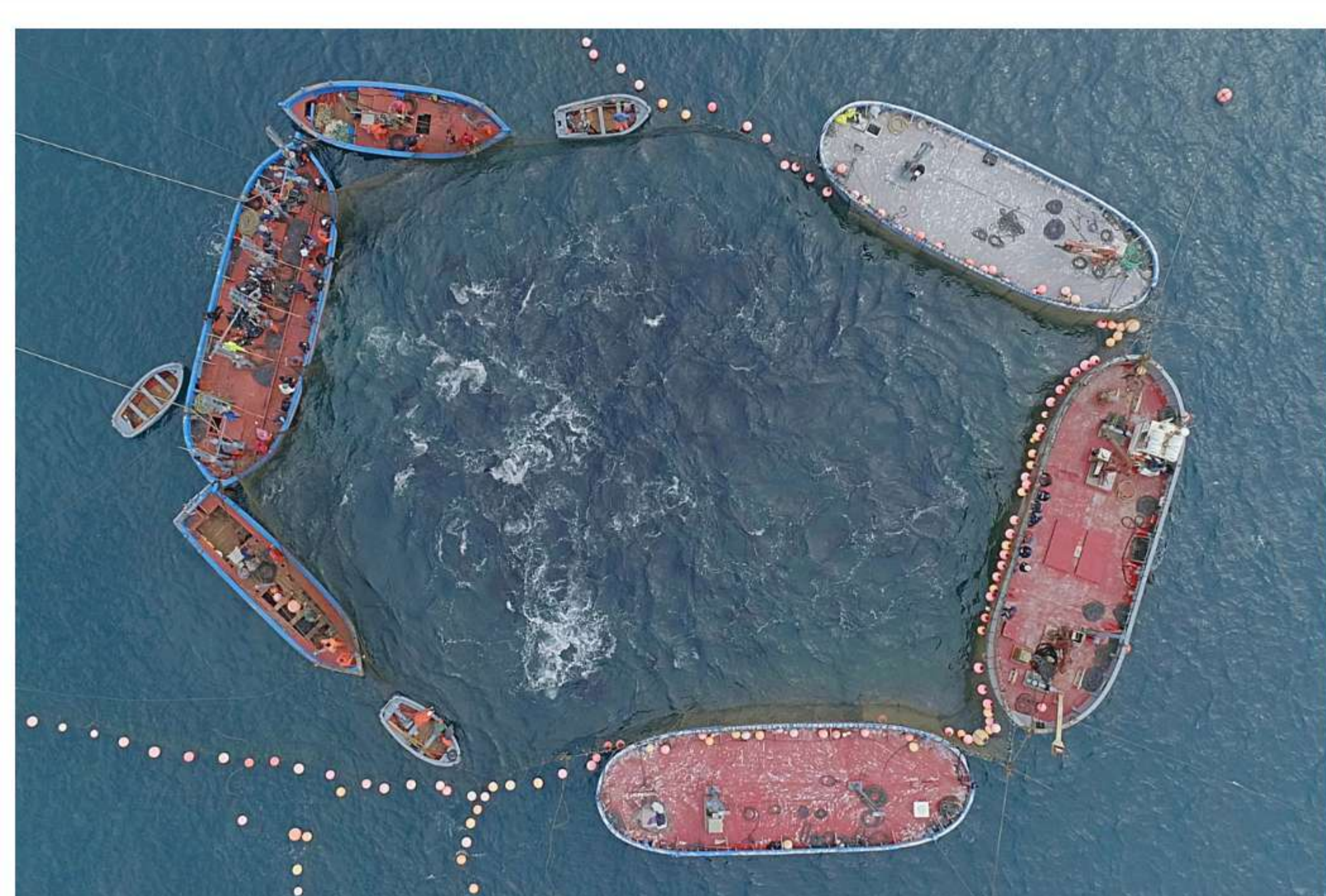
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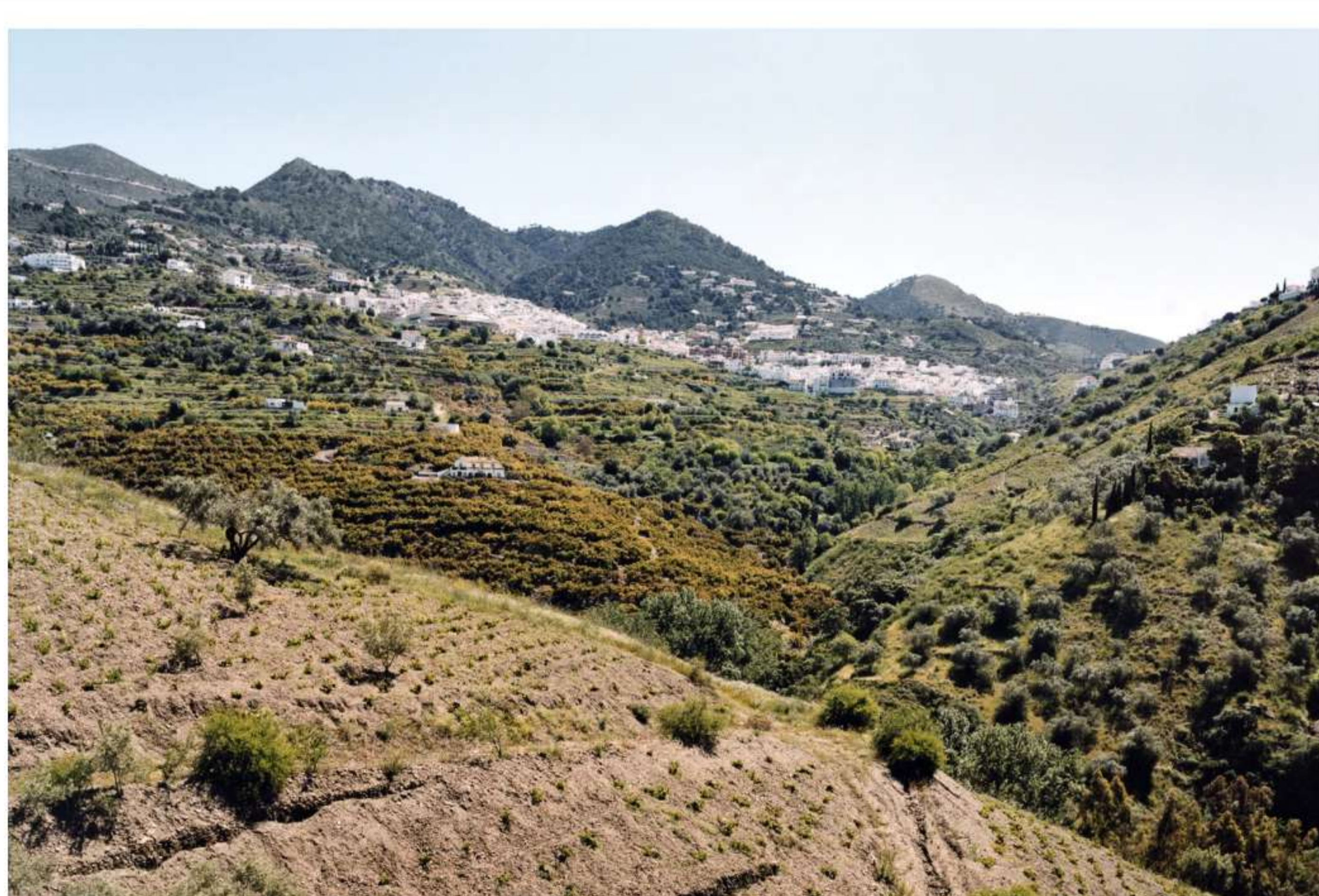
Andalusia is one of the largest autonomous communities in Spain and the place where all the country's clichés come together. The southernmost region of the country, its long coastline is home to some of the most popular beaches in Europe, the Moorish architecture of cities like Seville and Granada is typical of Spain and Andalusia is the home of that most famous of Spanish music and dance; flamenco.

A region as large as this inevitably has a great variety of food and drink, but what almost all of Andalusia's dishes have in common is some of the best olive oil in the world. There are no fewer than thirteen different protected geographical areas (PDO & PGI) producing extra virgin olive oil from 1,672,995 olive trees across Andalusia, with the biggest production happening in the province of Jaén. There are a large variety of olives grown in the region, although Picual, which makes a fruity, bitter oil, and Hojiblanca, which makes a sweeter, slightly spicy oil, are the two most popular types. The large, plump Gordal olive which isn't used to produce oil but sold intact, has a sweet taste and is often stuffed with peppers or anchovies, is much loved in Andalusia and is becoming increasingly popular in the UK.

With all of this great olive oil available on the doorstep, it's no surprise that Andalusians are renowned deep-fryers. Most famous are the pescadito, tiny fried fish, of Cádiz, and across Spain fritura andaluza means a variety of seafood simply dipped in flour and skilfully deep-fried using good quality oil. Equally famous dishes from the hottest region in Spain are the cold soups, including gazpacho, salmorejo from Córdoba and ajoblanco from Málaga and Granada. All of these have high quality extra virgin olive oil as a key ingredient, thanks to its flavour and texture.



Ingredient Focus: wild almadraba bluefin tuna  
by Great British Chefs



The wine regions of Spain: Málaga  
by Great British Chefs

Having such a long coastline means it's inevitable that Andalusia's seafood is a point of pride. On the Málaga coastline there's the espeto tradition of cooking sardines on a spike, which is stuck into the sand over a fire, while Almería's star product is the Garrucha red prawn. The most prestigious sea product from Andalusia, though, is undoubtedly the almadraba blue fin tuna from Cádiz. Known as atún rojo (red tuna), and nowadays caught via a sustainable almadraba system, it has become famous in recent years for its versatility and flavour. There is now a range of tuna products available, from the traditional air-dried loin known as mojama, which, when it comes from Barbate or Isla Cristina, has its own geographical protected status, to newer smoked tuna products and preserved, tinned cheek.

Twenty-first century Andalusia can also lay claim to being the vegetable garden of Europe, with so much of the fruit and vegetables eaten throughout Europe coming from there. Strawberries from Huelva, tomatoes from Almería and avocados from Málaga are now, alongside the olive, hugely important industries in the region, with cutting edge agricultural techniques developed by a highly-skilled workforce which was educated at the region's universities. Chefs and home cooks throughout the region take advantage of having such high quality fruit and vegetables grown nearby and are increasingly using non-traditional ingredients like avocado and mango in their dishes.

The region is very well-known for its pork and pork products; Andalusia is one of the homes of the black Iberian breed of pig which feed on acorns and the legs are cured and aged from 18 to 30 months to make Iberico acorn fed ham, the best ham in the world. The two D.O.s that produce this ham in Andalusia are D.O. Jabugo in the west and DO Los Pedroches towards the centre and both produce hugely admired acorn fed iberico ham for the top restaurants and delicatessens across the world. Trevélez, in the province of Granada, is another well-known area for high quality ham, with its own geographical protected status and most of its hams are made from Large White and Duroc/Jersey breeds. The mountainous areas of the region are ideal for goats, and inland goat and kid take pride of place on many menus.

When it comes to drink, D.O. sherry is the most famous wine in Andalusia and one of the most famous fortified wines in the world, but other fortified wines such as D.O. Málaga and D.O. Montilla-Moriles have recently given themselves a shake and are attracting winemakers interested in both reviving traditions and bringing back the glory days of these wines. The biggest news in Andalusian wine of the twenty-first century so far has been the return to and the expansion of dry wine. The three D.O.s are Condado de Huelva, Granada and Sierras de Málaga, each one with its own specific characteristic style. D.O. Condado de Huelva's main unfortified wine production is a light white wine made from the indigenous Zalema grape, while D.O. Granada uses a mixture of indigenous grapes such as Pedro Ximénez, Vijariego and Monastrell, as well as other international varieties that adapt well to the climate. The newest D.O. of the three, having been formed in 2001, Sierras de Málaga is attracting winemakers from all over who are building all types of wineries and using all types of grapes both international and indigenous, although the most popular grape is Moscatel de Alejandría.

Andalusia is a place all food lovers should have on their map as a place to eat and drink, as it has some of the best produce and wine that the twenty-first century has to offer.

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